

SPANISH FORK

City on the Rio De Aguas Calientes





A model of the Dominguez-Escalante Monument erected on City Park in 1976. Sylvestre, the Indian guide, is at left.

1776

On September 23, 1776, a small cross was placed on an old lake bench at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the coming of the first non-Indians to the Valley. These first visitors were two Franciscan friars, Fray Silvestre de Escalante (diarist) and Fray Francisco Atansio Dominguez (leader), and their company of "hispanic and mixed breed laymen." Their objective was to open a trail from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the missions of Northern California. They had left Santa Fe on July 29, 1776, and reached Utah Valley on September 23; they were never to reach Northern California. Their route into Utah Valley followed the Diamond Fork River (which they called Rio de San Lino) to Spanish Fork Canyon and then west along the Spanish Fork River. They described Diamond Fork and Spanish Fork Canyons as having "pretty bends in both of them and everything just right for sheep-herding camps." A hundred years later others who explored the canyons came to the same conclusion.

In Spanish Fork Canyon they passed three large sulphur springs (later to be the site of Castilla Springs, a popular bathing and health resort). Because of these springs they named the river that flowed through the canyon "Rio de Aguas Calientes"--River of Warm Water.

Then (quoting from the translated journal kept by Escalante) "We went for half a league northwest, crossed over to the other side of the river, went up a small hill (the old lake bench where the cross was erected in 1976) and caught sight of the lake and spreading valley of Nuestra Senora de la Merced of the Timpanogotzis (Utah Valley)."

They followed the northern side of the river into the valley, crossed to the other side of the river and made camp on one of its "southerly meadows", which they named Vega del Dulcissimo Nombre de Jesus (The Plain of the Most Sweet Name of Jesus). Their campsite was about two miles south of the present town of Spanish Fork about where U.S. Highway 91 crosses the Spanish Fork River. They described this area and the river as follows: "...one toward the south is the one of hot waters upon the spreading meadows, where there is sufficient irrigable land for two good settlements." A hundred years later the Spanish Fork River and its deltas were indeed serving two "good settlements," Spanish Fork and Salem, plus several smaller communities.

However, it is not likely that Spanish Fork Canyon, Spanish Fork River, or Spanish Fork City were named after the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition; nor, as many think, did the Mormon settlers give these places their names. The name "Spanish Fork" appears on John C. Fremont's map of the area published in 1845, two years before the Mormons came to Utah and five years before the first settlers arrived in Palmyra. It is quite probable that the name "Spanish Fork" was derived from the fact that the route of the Taos trappers during the early part of the 1800's followed the canyon and the river.

Dominguez and his party found the Indians of the area eager to be friends. The settlers 75 years later also found the Indians friendly, but this feeling soon turned to hostility when the Indians realized they would have to give up their traditional hunting grounds to the newcomers. The Dominguez-Escalante Expedition spent only a short time in Utah Valley, their last camp being on September 26 at Peteetneet Creek where the Payson Memorial Park is presently located. Perhaps their short stay contributed to their popularity with the Indians.

If the Spanish padres had returned and established a mission among the Indians of Utah Valley, the history books would have had an entirely different story to tell of the years to come. As it was, only a handful of white men visited the valley during the

next seventy-five years, and they were merely passing through. This left Spanish Fork free to be settled by the Mormon pioneers.

1824

It is quite likely that Etienne Provost, accompanied by Francois LeClerc, visited the Spanish Fork area in 1824. It is possible that these men may even have followed the same route as did the Dominguez-Escalante expedition in 1776.

1844

On May 25, 1844, John C. Fremont entered Utah Valley and probably passed close to the present site of Spanish Fork. Eight months before Fremont had entered the Great Salt Lake Valley and from there had travelled 3,500 miles through a large part of Oregon and California. In 1844 he was on his way back east. He found the Utah Valley fertile and watered by a "delta of prettily timbered stream." "This," Fremont said, "would be an excellent locality for stock farms; it is generally covered with a good bunch grass, and would abundantly produce the ordinary grains." After a short stay in the valley, Fremont headed up Spanish Fork Canyon and reached Independence, Missouri, on July 31. He listed Spanish Fork Canyon on a map which he published in 1845.

1850

It is definitely known that the Dominguez-Escalante party camped on the banks of the Spanish Fork River, and others, including Jedediah Smith and John C. Fremont may have spent a few nights in the area, but the first white men to make a permanent camp were George Washington Sevy and Charles Ferguson. They arrived at what was to be the future site of Spanish Fork in the fall of 1850, bringing with them 200 head of cattle to be wintered on the lush grass of the area. The cattle belonged to Enoch Reese, pioneer businessman of Salt Lake City. Reese laid claim to 400 acres of land along the Spanish Fork River approximately two miles west of Spanish Fork.

In 1849 George Sevy was on his way to the gold fields when he fell ill, and his companions, anxious to start their quest for gold, left him by the side of the trail. He was picked up by other travellers and

brought to Salt Lake City. Here he was hired by Ferguson to bring the herd of cattle to Utah Valley. Sevy married Phoebe Melinda Butler, a daughter of Lowe Butler, in 1854, and they lived in Spanish Fork until 1861. At the time he came to the Spanish Fork area, Sevy was not a member of the LDS Church.

Charles Ferguson was thought to be from Augusta, Maine, and came to Utah in 1850. He married Clarissa Jane Wilson in Springville on May 4, 1851.

Enoch Reese was one of the first businessmen in the west. He built the third business on Main Street in Salt Lake City. In 1851 he went to Nevada and represented Carson County in the State Legislature until 1855. Reese is named as one of the first settlers in Spanish Fork, but it is doubtful if he ever lived there. If he did so, it was only for a short time, although the report has it that he "kept" the first mercantile store in Spanish Fork. It is thought that the cattle brought to Spanish Fork by Sevy and Ferguson were later taken to California--a hard, harrowing trip, if true.

These three men, then, were the first to make a permanent camp in the area. A short history is given of them, not because they were more important than others who followed them, but simply because they were the first.

During the winter of 1850-51 others came to the area along the Spanish Fork River. John Holt, John Redd, William Pace, and two more settled along river bottoms about three and a half miles east of Reese claim. The colonization of Spanish Fork had begun.

1851

The first pioneers who came to Utah settled in the Salt Lake Valley, but as the number of colonizers increased, they were encouraged to move to other parts of the territory. It was anticipated that great numbers of settlers would be coming, not only those from the great exodus from Nauvoo but also immigrants from Europe, and there would not be enough land for them all in Salt Lake Valley. It was also deemed advisable for the Mormons to lay claim to as much land as possible to prevent it from falling into the hands of others. Utah Valley was one of the most fertile valleys, so it was natural that settlement would soon take place there.

During the winter 1850-51 a few families took land along the Spanish Fork River; according to George A. Hicks (who came to Spanish Fork in 1851 at the age of seventeen) they were John Holt, John Redd, William Pace, Patrick, and Glenn (the last names of the last two were unknown). Hicks also said